

Chapter 18

Furbearers



Note: Not all species listed in this chapter are found in Michigan. If you trap a Canada lynx, cougar, or wolverine in Michigan, please contact your local wildlife biologist or call the Report All Poaching (RAP) line at 800-292-7800 as soon as possible. The DNR Wildlife Division will want to document the capture and may want to collect biological samples. The biologist or conservation officer will also be able to assist in the release of the animal.

Arctic Fox

Alopex lagopus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Canidae



The arctic fox has a variable fur color. In summer, they are bluish brown or gray with light undersides. In winter they are white to cream-colored. There is also a blue-phase arctic fox that lives in areas without permanent snow cover. Arctic fox weigh 5.5 to 9 pounds and measure 30 to 36 inches with a 10 to 14-inch bushy tail. Females are smaller than males. The body is compact. Its legs and ears are short, and the footpads are thickly haired, all of which help it conserve heat in subzero weather.

The arctic fox is found in western and northern Alaska, and Northern Canada living in the tundra or on ice floes. They den in hillsides or snowbanks. They eat heavily in the summer and bury food for the winter in the permafrost. Arctic fox follow polar bears and eat leftovers along with rodents, birds, eggs, fish, berries, young seals, and carrion. Breeding occurs from February to May, resulting in one litter of 6 to 12 young.

Badger

Taxidea taxus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Badgers are wide, flat carnivores with a grizzled gray appearance and a distinctive white stripe from their nose, over their head, and ending between their shoulders. Average adults weigh 12 to 16 pounds, but may increase to 20 or more in the fall. Badgers are well known for their digging ability and fierce disposition. Badgers use multiple elaborate dens with tunnels from 6 to 15 feet deep and as much as 30 feet to an elevated main chamber. Badgers use bedding material and have a separate toilet chamber.

Badgers occur primarily in the western and north central states, with some eastward expansion. They occupy a home range of 3 to 4 square miles of prairie, open farmland, deserts, and woods if the soil is suitable for digging. Badgers eat prairie dogs, gophers, skunks, snakes, birds, eggs, worms, insects, carrion, and berries. Young badgers are eaten by coyotes and eagles. Breeding occurs in August or September with implantation delayed until February. Badgers have one litter a year with 2 to 7 young.



Beaver

Castor canadensis; Order: Rodentia; Family: Castoridae



Beaver are large, bulky rodents capable of altering their habitat by building dams and lodges, but they will also den in river banks. Adults can exceed 60 pounds. The hind feet are large and fully webbed. Beaver have a distinctive, large, flat tail that can be used as a rudder or slapped loudly on the water to sound an alarm. Beaver have sharp teeth, capable of cutting down large trees. Colors vary from blonde to black. The beaver is primarily nocturnal and both sexes have large castor glands beneath the skin on the lower belly.

Beaver range throughout most of the U.S., except for Florida, Nevada, and southern California. Habitats include rivers, streams, marshes, lakes, and ponds. Foods include tree bark, water lilies, and crops. Otters, bears, lynx, bobcats, wolves, and coyotes prey on beaver. In good habitat a beaver's home range will cover up to .6 mile of a stream or river. If food is scarce they may travel as far as 650' from the water. Beaver breed in late January or February and have one litter averaging 4-5 kits.

Bobcat

Lynx rufus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Felidae



Bobcats have short tails. They are colored red, brown, or grey on the back and lighter below with black spots on the front legs and bellies that fade as the animal ages. Bobcats are primarily nocturnal and normally weigh 18 to 22 pounds with females on the smaller side. Large individuals have been reported weighing as much as 76 pounds. Bobcats have retractable claws that do not show up in tracks. Bobcats will wade or swim.

Bobcats range throughout most of the U.S. occupying dense forests, mountains, prairies, farmland, deserts, and swamps, often denning in rock outcroppings. Bobcats eat rabbits, beaver, and occasionally deer. Coyotes, eagles, fisher, wolves, and mountain lions prey upon bobcats. Adult male bobcats sometimes eat juveniles. Breeding occurs during February and March, with one litter a year producing 1 to 4 young. Females breed during the first year, and males at 2 years. Females occupy a home range of about 6 square miles while males may roam over as much as 60 square miles.

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Canada Lynx *(see note on page 126)*

Lynx canadensis; Order: Carnivora; Family: Felidae



The Canada Lynx is on the U.S. Endangered Species List and classified as threatened in the lower 48 where it was always rare because its primary prey, the snowshoe hare, is mostly found in Canada and Alaska. Canada Lynx are light gray, with scattered brown to black hair, cinnamon colored underparts and short tails. Males are larger than females, with weights ranging from 11 to 40 pounds.

Canada Lynx are found in Alaska, northern states, parts of the Rocky Mountains, and New England living in coniferous forests, bogs, and swamps. During the day, Canada Lynx rest in cover. They climb trees and often leap down onto prey including snowshoe hares, birds, and voles. They will also eat larger dead animals, or take weakened deer, caribou, or sheep. They pose little threat to humans or domestic animals. Wolves and mountain lions will prey on Canada Lynx. They breed in March or April, producing one litter of 3 to 4 young.

Coyote

Canis latrans; Order Carnovora; Family: Canidae



Coyotes are medium to large canines normally mottled with grey, but sometimes they are brown, reddish, or black. Average weights in the west are 25 to 30 pounds but larger in the eastern U.S. with some individuals reaching as much as 60 pounds. Coyotes are intelligent and adaptable, living in a wide variety of habitats including urban and suburban areas. Coyotes are abundant and they have become less wary of humans in recent years. Attacks on people and pets have been documented.

Coyotes are widely distributed through the U.S. except for Hawaii. Males have a home range of 30 to 40 square miles, females considerably less. Opportunistic feeders, coyotes eat mice, rabbits, insects, reptiles, fawns, carrion, fruits, and seeds. Adult coyotes have few predators, but juveniles are eaten by dogs, mountain lions, and eagles. Breeding occurs in February in the south, and March in the north. Coyotes have one litter a year averaging 3 to 6 pups.



Fisher

Martes pennanti; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Fisher have long slender bodies and range in color from gray brown to dark brown to nearly black with a long, tapering, bushy tail. Males weigh 7.5 to 12 pounds, and females 4.5 to 5.5 pounds. Adult males measure 35.5 to 47 inches in length, with females shorter at 29.5 to 37.5 inches. Fisher have two anal scent glands that produce a foul-smelling liquid. Fisher are primarily nocturnal and travel mostly on the ground, but they are agile tree climbers and sometimes swim.

Fisher are found in the northwest U.S., upper Great Lakes, and New England in dense forests of conifers mixed with hardwoods near water. Nest dens are high in hollow trees, with temporary dens under logs, brush, or tree roots. Fisher travel widely with a home range of 50 to 150 square miles, more if food is scarce. They prey on snowshoe hares, porcupines, rodents, birds, eggs, and carrion. Fisher are eaten by hawks, owls, coyotes, bobcats, and black bears. Breeding occurs in March and April with delayed implantation and birth 51 weeks after mating. Fisher have one litter a year, with 1 to 5 kits. Both sexes are sexually mature at one year of age.

Gray Fox

Urocyon cinereoargenteus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Canidae



Gray fox are small nocturnal canines, more aggressive than red fox, and they have the ability to climb trees for food or refuge. Grays weigh 8 to 11 pounds, heavier in the north, and measure 31 to 44 inches with a 12 to 15 inch black-tipped tail. Fur is gray above and red on the lower sides, chest, and back. Gray fox will cache food. Grays are considered to be easier to trap than red fox, but they do learn and may become trap-wise.

Gray fox are found in eastern states, the southern third of western states, and along the west coast in varied habitats with a preference for more wooded areas. Gray fox have a small home range of one square mile or less. Grays use dens more than red fox, especially in the north. Dens are usually natural cavities marked with snagged hair and scattered bones. Food includes rabbits, other small mammals, birds, insects, plants, and fruit. Bobcats, domestic dogs, and coyotes prey on gray fox. Breeding occurs from January to early May, resulting in one litter averaging 3 to 4 pups.

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Gray Wolf

Canis lupus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Canidae



The gray wolf is the largest wild canine, reaching adult weights of 57 to 130 pounds. It is on the U. S. Endangered Species List except for Alaska, but expanding in population in some areas. Gray wolves can be hunted and trapped in Alaska. Colors range from white to black. Wolves carry their tails straight out, while the smaller coyote holds the tail at a downward angle. Domestic dog's tails curve up.

The gray wolf is found in Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Michigan, Minnesota, Yellowstone, and a few other areas, where they prefer forests or open tundra. They live and hunt in packs of 2 to 15 members that range up to 260 square miles. Gray wolves normally eat close to four pounds of food a day, but can go long periods between meals. They hunt at night feeding on moose, caribou, deer, berries, birds, fish, and insects. Gray wolves seldom use dens, except for maternity dens. Wolves are sexually mature at two, breed during late January to February, and produce one litter a year averaging 5 to 6 pups.

There is no hunting or trapping season for wolves in Michigan. Therefore, if you catch a wolf in your trap you will need to release it. If the animal died in your trap, or if you need assistance releasing it, contact your local wildlife biologist or call the toll-free Report All Poaching number at 1-800-292-7800.

Kit Fox

Vulpes macrotis; Order: Carnivora; Family: Canidae



The kit fox is a small, long-legged canine with large ears. It is yellowish above and lighter below with a prominent black-tipped tail, and weighs 3 to 5 pounds. It is 24 to 31 inches in length, with a 9 to 12-inch tail. Some people consider the kit fox to be a sub-species of the more easterly swift fox.

The kit fox is found in arid grassland regions of Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and Colorado. They eat rodents and rabbits. The San Joaquin Kit Fox is an endangered subspecies due to the destruction or alteration of the grasslands where it lives. Kit fox breed from January to February, producing one litter of 3 to 5 young a year.



Marten

Martes americana; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Marten are small weasel-like woodland mammals varying from light to dark brown with a bushy tail and orange throat. It weighs from 1 to 3.5 pounds, with males larger than females. Marten are active in the early morning, late afternoon, at night, and on cloudy days. They can climb trees, but spend most of their time on the ground foraging for rodents. Their large feet allow them to walk on snow. Marten sometimes bury meat and both sexes establish scent posts.

Marten range from New England to the northern Great Lakes states, the Rocky Mountains, and the northern west coast living in coniferous forests with numerous dead trees and debris. Their home range is as small as one square mile but the range varies with sex, food availability, and habitat. Marten den in hollow trees, fallen logs, rocks, squirrel nests, and woodpecker holes. Food includes red-backed voles, other rodents, red squirrels, and birds. Fisher and owls prey on marten. Breeding occurs in July with delayed implantation. They have one litter a year with 1 to 6 young. Both sexes breed during their second year of life.

Mink

Mustela vison; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Mink are small nocturnal carnivores with short dense fur shaded chocolate to nearly black with small patches of white on the chin, throat, or belly. Some have light fur and they are known as cotton mink. Males measure 20 to 30 inches with weights over 3 pounds, while females are smaller at 16 to 21 inches and 1.5 to 2 pounds. Mink have glands in the anal area that can release a powerful, unpleasant smelling musk. They are quick on land, skilled swimmers, and capable tree climbers.

Mink are widely distributed across the U.S. except for the southwest and Florida. They inhabit streams, rivers, marshes, lakes, and ponds. Males range widely over routes of 25 miles or more, while females stay close to their dens in holes, hollow logs, rock piles, beaver lodges, muskrat lodges, or abandoned muskrat dens. Males maintain numerous dens and often cache food in some of them. Mink eat muskrats, crayfish, frogs, fish, rabbits, birds, insects, and snakes. Owls, fox, coyotes, bobcats, and dogs prey on mink. Breeding occurs in late February or early March with delayed implantation. They have one litter a year with an average of four young.

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Muskrat

Ondatra zibethica; Order: Rodentia; Family: Cricetidae



Muskrats are small rodents with dense glossy brown fur and a hairless tail, weighing 1 to 2 pounds in the south and 3 to 4 pounds in the north. Total length varies from 19 to 25 inches. Muskrats are nocturnal and can swim forwards and backwards with the aid of partially-webbed hind feet. Males have prominent musk glands beneath the skin on their lower abdomen that swell in the spring and produce a yellowish musky-smelling fluid.

Muskrats are found throughout most of North America except for the arctic, most of California, Texas, Florida, and the southwest.

Habitats include marshes, lakes, ponds, streams, and ditches where they feed on aquatic plants such as cattails, rushes, and water lilies. Mink, fox, coyotes, hawks, and owls eat muskrats. Muskrats burrow into banks of streams and ponds, and they build prominent lodges out of cattails or other vegetation in marshes and lakes. They have a small home range, seldom traveling more than 200 feet from their den. Breeding occurs from late winter to September in the north, and year-round in the south, producing 1 to 5 litters a year and 1 to 11 young per litter. Muskrats are sexually mature at six months of age.

Nutria

Myocastor coypus; Order: Rodentia; Family: Myocastor



Nutria are large rodents introduced to the U.S. from South America that create habitat problems in some areas. They have a negative impact on muskrats, waterfowl, and other native wildlife. Nutria weigh 5 to 25 pounds and measure up to 24 inches with a long, scaly, rounded tail that stretches another 12 to 17 inches. Males are larger than females.

Nutria are found in scattered locations including Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington, and Oregon where they occupy marshes, lakes, ponds, and streams. Dominant males share a den with 2 or 3 females and the young. Den entrances are 12 to 24 inches below the water and as much as 24 inches in diameter. The inner chamber is above the waterline and lined with grasses. The home range usually includes about 1,000 feet of habitat along a dike or shoreline. Nutria eat most any green plant and grains. Alligators, hawks, owls, and eagles prey on nutria. Breeding occurs throughout the year with 1 to 11 young per litter. Sexual maturity is at 5 to 6 months.



Opossum

Didelphus virginiana; Order: Didelphimordia; Family: Didelphidae



Opossums are the only marsupial in North America. They have a fur-lined pouch, and a prehensile, flesh-colored or whitish tail. The fur is grayish-white. Males average 6 to 7 pounds, up to 14 pounds, while females are smaller. Total lengths range up to 36 inches. Opossums are nocturnal and known for the habit of “playing dead” when threatened. They are strong climbers and swimmers.

Originally opossums were restricted to the southeast U.S., but spread widely due to human activity after European settlement. They are now found throughout the eastern U.S. and on the west

coast. Habitats include deciduous woodlands near water, but they are also suburban pests. Opossums make leaf nests in hollow logs, fallen trees, or abandoned burrows. Home ranges are small from 10 to 200 acres. Opossums are omnivorous, eating nearly any plant, animal, insect, or carrion. Coyotes, fox, raccoons, bobcats, eagles, snakes, hawks, and owls prey on opossums. Most breeding occurs in February and litters have 5 to 13 young, which stay in the pouch for 60 days. Opossums are sexually mature at 6 to 8 months.

River Otter

Lontra canadensis; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Otters are long, slender, short-haired furbearers known to be playful and intelligent. The fur is a rich, glossy, shade of brown and lighter on the cheeks, throat, and belly. Males grow to 48 inches and 25 pounds while females are 4 to 6 inches shorter and 19 pounds or less. Both sexes have anal musk glands that release when the animal is frightened. The musk is less pungent than other mustelids. Otters have webbed toes and non-retractable claws. They also have valves in their nose and ears that close when they are underwater.

Otters range over Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, Great Lakes States, the Mississippi River Valley, to the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal states. They inhabit remote rivers, lakes, wetlands, and beaver ponds eating fish, frogs, crayfish, mollusks, beaver, muskrats, and vegetation. Adult otters are rarely killed by other animals with some predation by lynx, wolves, bobcats, and coyotes. The home range varies from 450 to 14,000 acres or 5 to 50 linear miles of shoreline. Otters infrequently use dens but may occupy old beaver dens and lodges. Otters mate at 2 years of age. Breeding occurs in March and April resulting in one litter a year of 2 to 3 young.

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Raccoon

Procyon lotor; Order: Carnivora; Family: Procyonidae



Raccoons are medium size adaptable furbearers with a masked face and ringed-tail. Average weights are 9 to 20 pounds, but larger in the north where weights up to 62 pounds have been reported. Fur color varies from dirty blonde with darker guard hairs to reddish and darker colors. The hind legs are longer than the front ones, creating a hunched appearance when running.

Raccoons are widely distributed across the U.S. where they use varied habitats from streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands to forests, prairies, farmland, and urban areas. Home ranges vary by habitat from 15 acres in urban environments to 12,000 acres in prairies. Raccoons den in hollow trees, ground burrows, brush piles, muskrat houses, barns, buildings, clumps of cattails, haystacks, and rock crevices. They are omnivores eating fish, crayfish, mussels, fruits, grains, small animals, birds, and muskrats. Coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, owls, eagles, and fishers prey on raccoons. Breeding occurs in January in the north to March in the south. Litters average 2 to 5 young, up to 8. Females breed their first year, males at two years of age.

Red Fox

Vulpes vulpes; Order: Carnivora; Family: Canidae



Red fox are small, shy, and adaptable with a capacity for learning from experience. Red fox weigh 10 to 12 pounds, but heavier in the north up to 14 pounds. Lengths range from 35 to 41 inches with a 14 to 17 inch bushy tail tipped in white. Commonly red on top, gray to white lower, with black on the ears, lower legs, and feet. Other color phases include black, silver, and crosses between red and silver. Red fox are primarily nocturnal and have the ability to hear low frequencies that let them detect small prey underground.

Red fox are widely distributed across the U.S. except for parts of the west. Habitats include mixed cultivated fields, woodlots, and brushland. The home range is generally 2 to 3 square miles, but varies with habitat and prey. Red fox eat small mammals, birds, insects, crayfish, corn, berries, acorns, and other vegetation. Coyotes prey on red fox and trappers often note lower red fox populations when coyotes increase in number. Red fox use maternity dens to raise their young. The dens are often old woodchuck or badger diggings on slopes with good visibility. Breeding occurs in January to early March, resulting in one litter of 1 to 10 kits.



Ringtail/Bassarisk

Bassariscus astutus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Procyonidae



Ringtails have cat-like bodies and long, bushy tails with 14 to 16 distinct bands of black and white. They weigh 2 to 2.5 pounds. Some people call them “miner’s cats” because were once used in mines to control rats. During the day they stay in dens. They can climb trees or walls, and they are excellent leapers.

The ringtail’s range includes southwest Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Kansas, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. They live in rocky areas, or sometimes wooded areas with hollow trees. A varied diet includes insects, snakes, lizards, toads, frogs, birds, small mammals, carrion, and fruit. They breed in April producing one litter of 2 to 4 young.

Striped Skunk

Mephitis mephitis; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Striped skunks are small, heavy-bodied, black animals with two white stripes on the back that meet and form a white cap on the head. Skunks measure 20 to 30 inches and weigh 3.5 to 10 pounds. They are well known for their ability to spray a stong-smelling, yellowish, oily fluid for protection. Primarily nocturnal, skunks have poor eyesight, keen hearing, and a strong sense of smell. Skunks are capable of swimming, but they are poor climbers.

Striped skunks are widespread across North America where they inhabit open fields, farms near water, urban, and suburban areas.

The home range is small, generally less than one square mile in size. Skunks are omnivores, eating insects, rodents, eggs, carrion, and vegetation. Owls, coyotes, bobcats, fox, badger, lynx, fisher, golden eagles, and mountain lions will prey on skunks. Skunks use dens abandoned by other animals or hollow logs, and may use communal dens with other animals. Breeding occurs from February to April producing one litter of 2 to 10 young per year. They are sexually mature at 8 to 9 months of age.

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Swift Fox

Vulpes velox; Order: Carnivora; Family: Canidae



The swift fox is similar to the kit fox but lives in prairies east of the Rocky Mountains. The swift fox has longer ears with bases closer to the center of the skull, a more rounded and dog-like head, and a tail that is shorter than the kit fox in relation to body length. The swift fox is primarily nocturnal. Populations have declined due to conversion of prairies to croplands, overgrazing, and poisoning.

Weasels

Mustela frenata, *Mustela erminea*; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Weasels are small furbearers with short fur, generally light brown above and cream-colored on the throat and belly, with black-tipped tails. In northern areas their coats change to white in the winter, and these are called ermine. Adult long-tailed weasels (*M. frenata*) measure 13 to 17 inches including a 4.5 to 6.5 inch tail. Males are larger than females. Short-tailed weasels have tails 4 inches long or less. Weasels are primarily nocturnal.

Long-tailed weasels are widely distributed in the U.S., except for the southwest, while short-tailed weasels are in most of the far northern states. Habitats include mountains, farmland, forests, and prairies near water. Weasels generally stay within a half-mile of their den. They eat mice, voles, chipmunks, rabbits, birds, eggs, and poultry. They are eaten by fox, mink, coyotes, bobcats, hawks, and owls. Both sexes use a single den in hollow stumps, tree roots, rock piles, or under old buildings. Dens are lined with grasses and fur from prey animals. Weasels breed in July with delayed implantation, producing one litter with an average of six young. Females mate at 3 to 4 months, males during their second year of life.



Wolverine (see note on page 126)

Gulo luscus; Order: Carnivora; Family: Mustelidae



Wolverines are the largest terrestrial member of the weasel family, resembling a small bear, but moving and behaving like weasels. Their fur is thick, glossy, and dark brown, sometimes with a light face mask. A stripe runs from the shoulders, down the sides, and over the rump. They have a bushy tail. Males grow to 44 inches and 40 pounds, while females are about 25% smaller. They can release musk from their anal glands.

Wolverines are found in Alaska, Canada, and parts of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Oregon where they inhabit boreal forests and tundra. They feed on rodents and scavenge for food including deer, caribou, and moose, but they also raid traps and cabins. Wolverines cover a large home range of 1,000 square miles or more. They travel with a slow lope, but they can swim and they are quick climbers. Mating occurs from April to September, but implantation is delayed until winter, producing one litter of 2 to 5 young.

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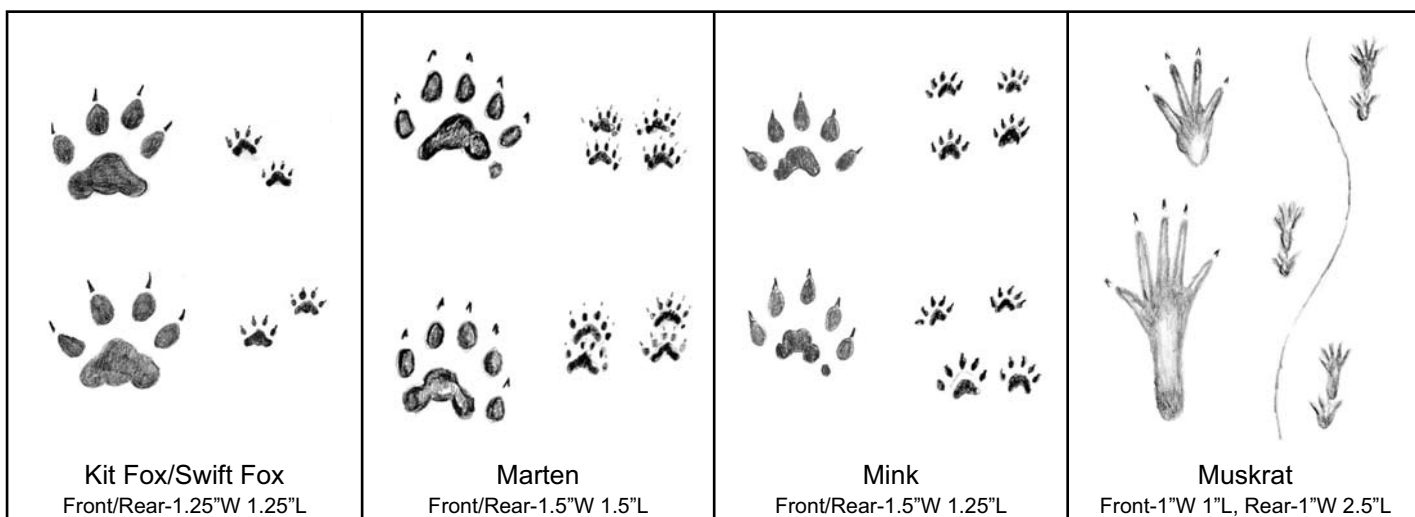
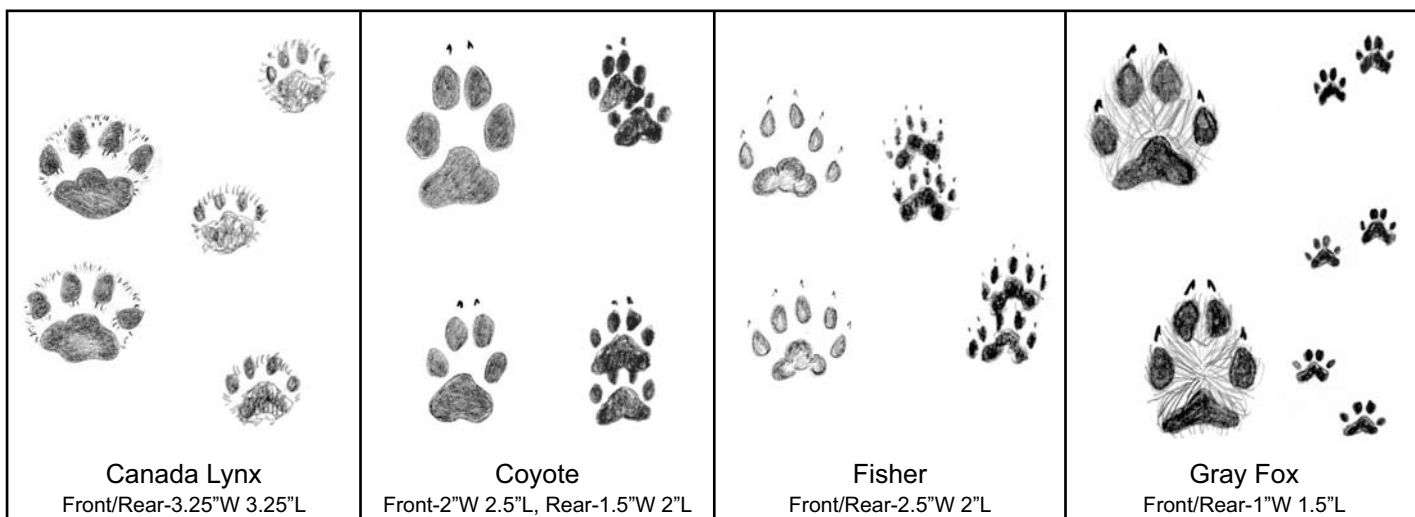
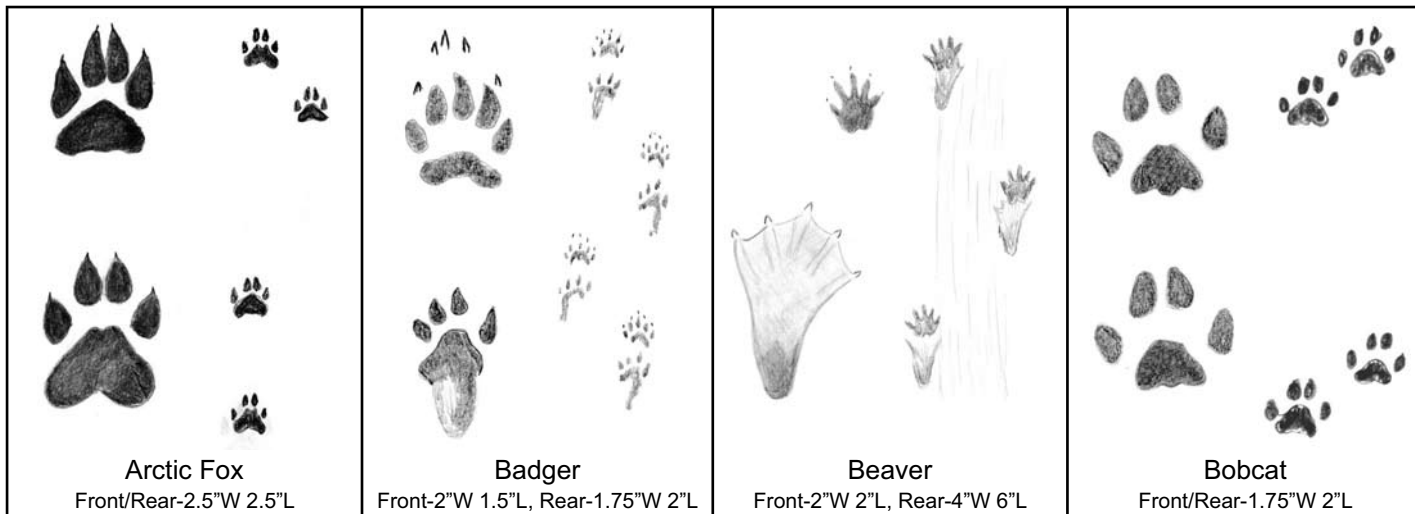


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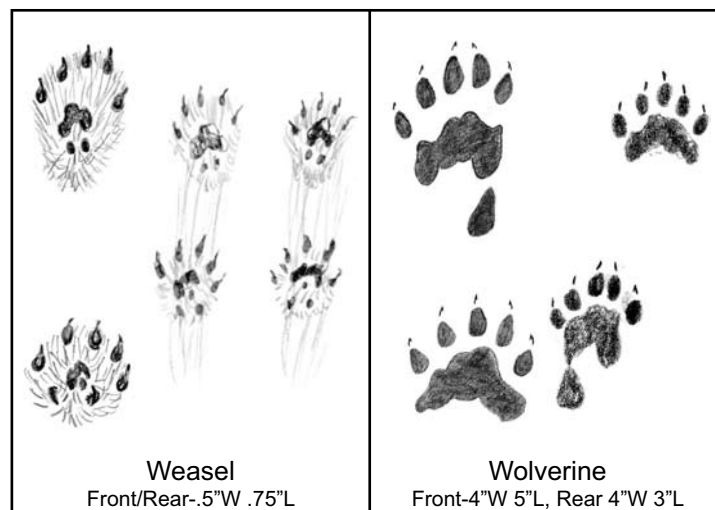
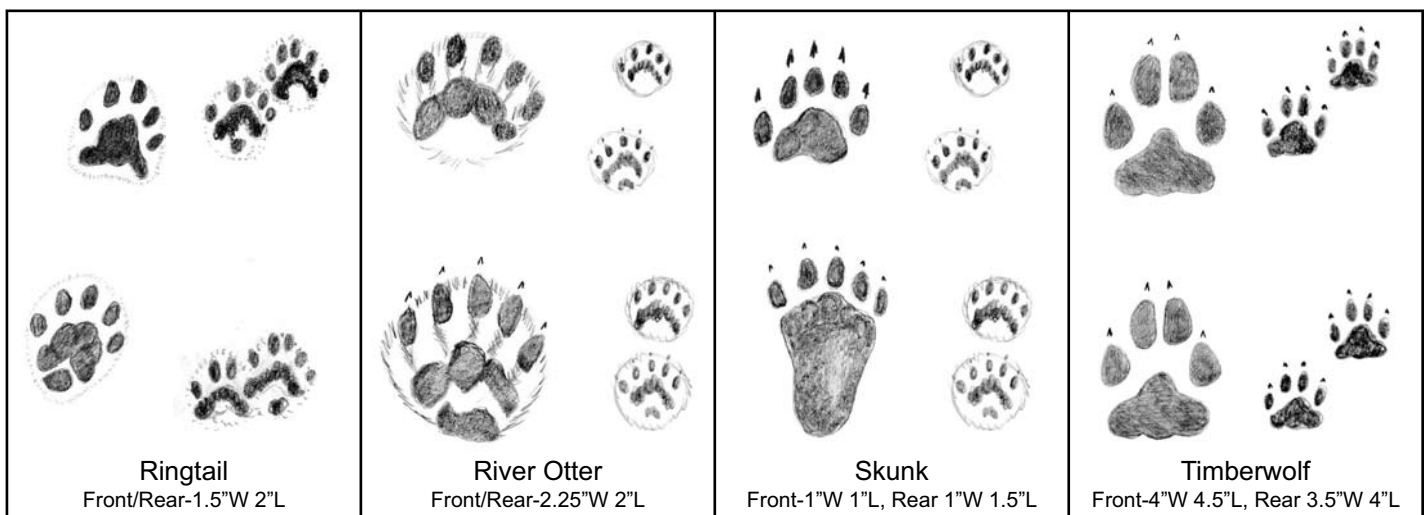
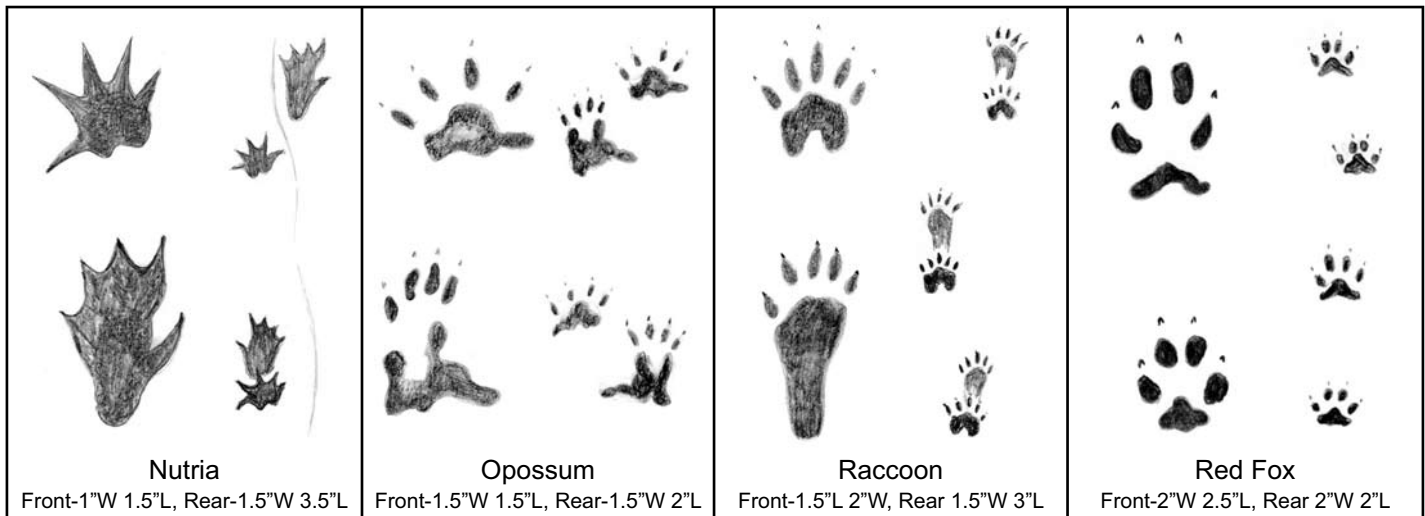


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